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Meanwhile, warmer weather freed the crude oil near Savage, and by the last week in March both the soy bean oil and crude oil were draining into the Minnesota

and Mississippi rivers. Federal, State, and local officials concentrated remedial actions at Spring Lake--a backwater area where large numbers of migrating waterfowl stop.

On April 1, Federal wildlife officials attempted a large-scale baiting operation to keep the migrating waterfowl from the deadly contaminated water. They were only partly successful. Despite the efforts of dozens of volunteer citizens working day and night in "Operation Duck Rescue"--trying to clean and keep alive hundreds of dying oil-soaked ducks--Federal officials now estimate that as many as 2,000 ducks were killed by the oil.

In announcing Department of the Interior efforts to find out the answers to questions about future effects of the pollution, Secretary Udall noted that the oil slick is now beginning to disperse and oxidize. This is a long, slow process--roughly comparable to the organic breakdown of sewage in a treatment plant.

Attorneys of the Department also are studying the conditions that led to the pollution problem, Secretary Udall said.

"The possibility of large-scale river pollution from oil storage tanks, pipelines, and other similar facilities is of great concern to us in the Department of the Interior," Secretary Udall said, "especially as such pollution may endanger parts of the National Wildlife Refuge system and vast areas of the Nation's water areas. We believe such incidents are preventable."

"We have an obligation to protect fully the national interest in such cases of large scale pollution," he added. "If this disaster had struck in a waterfowl wintering area, the entire resource of the Mississippi Flyway could have been endangered."

Conferences already have been held among representatives of the Department of the Interior, Minnesota State officials, and U. S. Public Health Service representatives to develop possible measures for preventing similar incidents in the future. These include safety devices on oil-storage tanks, revetments and dikes around storage areas, improved skimming devices for removing oil from water surfaces, and zoning arrangements on river flood plains.

Secretary Udall said the Department's Fish and Wildlife Service laboratory at LaCrosse, Wis., is speeding its studies of the pollution. The laboratory is operated by the Service's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife.

Department biologists noted that the heroic rescue efforts to save the oil soaked ducks were made against staggering odds. Cleaning of the ducks robs them of vital oils needed to keep them afloat and warm. When the natural oils are removed, the ducks are vulnerable for several weeks.

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